

Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health



February 11, 2022 Testimony: S.195 Certification of Mental Health Peer Specialists
Sandi Yandow, Executive Director (802) 578-9518 remote cell, syandow@vffcmh.org

Thank you and Good Morning Chair Lyons and Members of the Senate Health & Welfare Committee:

As the Executive Director of the Vermont Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, my hope is to share that we have been long standing supporters of peer certification and funded peer support. We appreciate the invitation to briefly share some of our involvement and insights as peer support "boots on the ground".

As one of the first chapters established under the umbrella of the National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (ffcmh.org) 32 years ago, we have been providing statewide peer support for families impacted by children's mental, emotional, behavioral concerns since our incorporation. We do this thanks to federal funding designating VFFCMH a Statewide Family Network for children's mental health.

A decade ago, the National Federation of Families finalized the in-depth and complex process to credential peer support specialists for families impacted by children's mental health and adolescent substance abuse. As a subject matter expert appointed by the Vermont Department of Health to be part of that 3-year process of regular meetings with a cast of many, I have first-hand knowledge of the rigors involved. The certification body's work is ongoing; the credentialing exam differs each time offered. I have included a link to the NFFCMH website and the certification process application, eligibility criteria, training, code of ethics, and core competencies detailed in its 32-page Candidate's Handbook. <https://www.ffcmh.org/certification>

While S.195 does not mention children's mental health specifically it does include family to family peer certification. As one of several family organizations in Vermont, we have not yet explored how this bill impacts our individual and collective missions. Peer support in multi-generational populations have common elements and expectations. A job/task analysis is a very important piece in creating certification; it examines our missions, our staff and our ways of work which are not one size fits all in training, scope, skill level, or funding.

Since 2012, the National Federation of Families Children's Mental Health has been VFFCMH's certifying body. I do not want to leave the impression that VFF, has a deep peer workforce already certified. We do not. Certification alone does not create depth in the peer workforce nor acceptance in the provider community.

In order to apply for certification through the NFFCMH, an applicant must document a minimum of 1000 hours of employment or volunteer experience in the field of family support, have a minimum of 88 hours of training and 20 hours of supervision/mentoring. Peer support certification implies there is a career path.

S.195 mentions a certifying body for substance use as well. VAMHAR announced in 2021 that Recovery Coaches trained through the Vermont Recovery Coach Academy and working or volunteering in the field of recovery, could apply for certification. That process is recognized by the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC), SAMHSA, HRSA, and the Vermont Department of Health. The certifying body is housed within Recovery Vermont; certification is reciprocal in 27 states, Guam & Singapore.

As for the definitions in this S.195 draft, "certification" of non-clinical peers does not give license to "provide mental health and substance use disorder treatment." VFF recommends that this definition be amended.

Thank you.

